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AN AUTHOR AT HIS RESIDENCE—PROF. JOHN RUSSELL, OF BLUFF DALE.

By John Reynolds.*

(From the *Belleville Advocate* of April 29, 1857.)

There exists in the public breast much respect for a meritorious author, and even his residence and habits are interesting.

In times of barbarism, physical strength and personal courage were the themes of poets and the subjects of historians; but in this more enlightened day, philosophy has demonstrated that thought governs the world, and that the highest honors are due to it. It is therefore not strange that the greatest fame and glory are now given to an author, whose life has been employed to advance the best interests of the human family.

Prof. John Russell, of Bluff Dale, the subject of this unpretending sketch, received an accomplished and a classic education at the college of Middlebury, Vermont. By incessant labors at the heads of the highest institutions of learning in the valley of the Mississippi, and by the classic and beautiful productions of his pen, he aided greatly in settling on a solid basis the literature and science of the country. He may be hailed with propriety, as one of the foremost and efficient pioneers, laboring in the western fields of literature. His mind is original, with an intense and acute sensibility, which has rendered him exceedingly modest and unassuming. He occupies the position which the poet Burns describes:

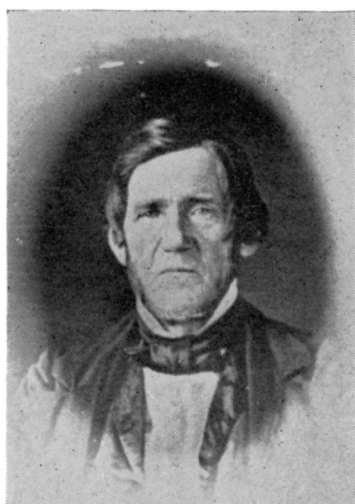
“Dearly bought the hidden treasure

Finer feelings can bestow—

Chords, that vibrate the sweetest pleasure,

Thrill the deepest notes of woe.”

*For the transcript of this paper the State Historical Society is grateful to Mrs. M. Ethel Huff, Librarian of the Belleville Public Library.



Prof. John Russell, Died Bluffdale, Greene County,
Illinois, January 2, 1863.

Is it wise, then, to risk even the bare possibility of
surrendering up our country with all her bright and
glorious hopes to the influence of dark-uncultivated
masses?

I shall venture to advance a step farther and
lay it down as an incontrovertible proposition,
that every child in these United States, is born with
a just, and inherent claim upon the government
of his country, to a good, common education.
This claim though not expressed in the very
letter, is guaranteed to him by the spirit of our
institutions.

The Declaration of Independence - the
great charter of American liberty - an instrument
that approaches nearer to the wisdom of the Omnia-
cient than any other human production - this
instrument declares that the object of all just

Fac-Simile of Handwriting of Prof. John Russell.

There are but few of the articles from his pen, published in the various literary papers and periodicals, however much they may have improved and charmed the public, which bear his name. They have been permitted to wend their way to fame by their intrinsic merit. Thus it was the untoward modesty of Prof. Russell, that for a period retarded his popularity as a writer; but at last his sun has shone out with the more brilliancy, and he at this day enjoys the high position of one of the most elegant and classic writers of the west.

Prof. Russell is a profound scholar and a master of most of the ancient and modern languages. He is familiar with the classics of both ages, and particularly with the Greek and French. His turn of thought and style of composition partake much of the Greek model, and the flowing and elegant periods, which abound in his writings, remind us of the French classics.

His composition frequently conveys the power of true pathos to the heart of the reader and his eyes are often filled with dripping tears before he is aware of the cause. The warm and genial glow of an honest and innocent heart breathes through all the writings of Prof. Russell, and in no time or circumstances are seen any frost or icicles congealed in his bosom.

Among the various productions of his pen, which have appeared in so many of the first periodicals of the day, none has attracted more attention or won for the author more fame, than the "Venomous Worm." That short article has been translated into most of the languages of Europe, and is found in almost all the school books. It is a grand conception and strikes a powerful blow at an alarming modern vice. This piece, like most of the others from the pen of Prof. Russell, was presented to the public without the name of the writer, but its merits were so manifest that it soon forced upon the public its paternity, and with its discovery much fame and respect to the head and heart of the author was bestowed.

It is said when the aged father of Prof. Russell read in Vermont, the anonymous article headed "The Venomous Worm," and was told who was the author, that the aged sire shed tears profusely at his good fortune to have such a son.

Prof. Russell has an ample competence, but is not wealthy, as he has never bent his knee before the altar of gold. His habits of life are plain and innocent, without the least ostentation or display. He is taciturn and retiring, but when raised, the ancient Celtic blood, coursing in the veins of the Russells, bursts forth into passion. This occurs but seldom. He is exceedingly plain in his diet, which has been the great cause of his good health for so many years, and his consequent vigor of mind and body. He is now verging on three score and ten years, and enjoys unimpaired the powers of his mental faculties.

Almost forty years since, Prof. Russell selected the romantic and beautiful site known far and near as "Bluff Dale" in Greene county, and has embellished and adorned it with neat buildings and much charming shrubbery. His stone mansion is erected with becoming proportions, not far from the perpendicular bluff of solid limestone, several hundred feet high. At the base of the bluff, near the mansion, gushes out of the rocks a perpetual fountain, which winds its way through the premises of the Professor towards the Illinois river, blending together both beauty and utility. The fabled water nymphs might enjoy an appropriate resting place in this clear and beautiful stream.

Prof. Russell spends much time in good weather on the summit of this bluff, enjoying the extended prospect up and down the valley of the Illinois river. These alluvial lands of the Illinois now occupy the ancient channel of the St. Lawrence, when all the waters of the Lakes flowed down this valley, and neither the Falls of Niagara nor the river had an existence.



Home of Prof. John Russell, Bluff Dale, Greene County,
Illinois.

Here the author gives license to those pensive melancholy thoughts which have so much influenced his writings. He enjoys, on this towering cliff, the same sentiment with which the English bard was so impressed.

“In these deep solitudes and awful dells
Where heavenly, pensive Contemplation dwells.”

It is to be hoped that the life of Professor Russell may be prolonged yet for many years.

Belleville, March 30, 1857.

MEMORIES OF BLUFFDALE.

To the foregoing paper of Gov. Reynolds the following memories of Prof. Russell's residence are appropriately added. They are from the pen of the Professor's granddaughter, Mrs. Pauline Russell Lair, of Council Hill, Oklahoma, written for the “Postal Reunion” edition of the Carrollton (Ill.) *Patriot* of Dec. 9, 1909.

Our editor's question recalls to my mind the old stone house where I lived so many years. It is the quaint old house at the foot of the bluffs, and is built of the limestone quarried from the cliffs that tower above it. Its gray walls so much resemble the cliffs that its kinship to them can be detected at a glance. “The old castle,” Elder Wm. Rhoades used to call it.

The pleasantest room in the old house, to my thinking, was the library upstairs, with its big sunny south window that has a sill wide enough for a cosy seat. How I used to love to curl up in it and read!

The walls on one side and across one end of the library are fitted up with shelves from the floor to the ceiling, and extending the entire length and breadth of the room.

These shelves were entirely filled with books—books of every kind and description and almost of every language—the frothiest of novels and the deepest works on metaphysics, maybe, resting peacefully side by side.

The finest divinity library I ever saw was here, and also the wickedest and most loathsome works on infidelity. The latest publications could be found on these shelves, as well as books printed in the Seventeenth century. We had Cotton Mather's "Magnalia," giving a detailed account of the doings of the Salem witches, in which he believed as strongly as he did in his own existence. We also had Darwin, who was trying to prove that everything was material and that man had not yet evolved a soul. There were books with the old-fashioned long "s" that looked so much like an f that you could hardly read them without lisping.

On the top of the book shelves were stored the relics of the Mound Builders, consisting of shell drinking cups, beads, pipes and any quantity of stone axes, arrows, etc. There was also here a carved powder horn, picked up on one of the battle-fields of the Revolutionary war, that had cut in it, the owner's name and the date of the carving. There was also a rock out of the Mormon temple at Nauvoo, a genuine tomahawk, an old-fashioned sickle or reap hook, and other things that I do not now remember.

In a nook near the window stood the old "cross-legged" table with its big wooden ink-well, and its iron pen-holder, filled with pens, and there were always quantities of writing paper piled up there.

Over by the door stood the "post-office," a tall, old-fashioned writing desk. Its upper part was fitted up with shelves and pigeon-holes where the mail that came to the Bluffdale postoffice was kept till called for.

Opening out of the library was a very large closet, sloping clear back to the eaves of the house, and extending the entire length of the room. In this closet were a great many boxes of magazines, novels, old letters and files of newspapers that my grandfather used to edit. I particularly remember copies of the Louisville Courier, printed in Louisville, Ky., because of its occasional ad-

vertisement for runaway slaves. The advertisements were always accompanied by a picture of a negro with a bundle getting away as fast as he could go.

I always entered this closet with caution, for my grandmother had told us of a black snake that had once been seen to crawl into it, and could never be found. That was forty or fifty years before, but who could tell whether that venerable serpent might not yet be lurking in some crack or crevice of the closet?

Another thing that added to the weirdness of the old closet was a gigantic face that my uncle William had once smoked with a lighted candle on its sloping ceiling.

Oh, well, the old place is haunted with pleasant memories and "ghosts of by-gone days." The old house is there still, but the old folks that made it a home are all gone.